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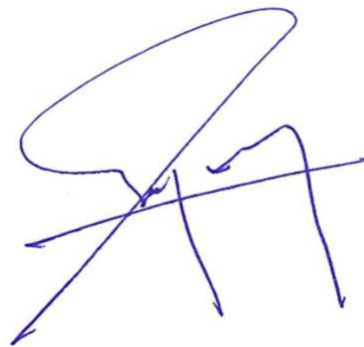
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Sir, Madam,

I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the article by Renata Salvarani entitled “Contacts and Connections between Jerusalem and Upper Nile: Pilgrims’ Routes, Narratives, Exchanges (6th–12th Centuries),” which has been peer-reviewed, has been accepted for publication in the collective work *Gateway to Africa. Cultural Exchanges Across the Cataracts. Proceedings of the International Conference Held at IFAO between November 1st-3rd, 2022*, edited by Valentina Gasperini, Gihane Zaki and Giuseppe Cecere. The scheduled publication date of the book is 2026. The book is due to appear in the BiEtud series (ISBN: 9782724711219), and its number has not yet been assigned with certainty yet. It should be 196.

For all due intents and purposes,



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## **Contacts and Connections Between Jerusalem and Upper Nile: pilgrims' routes, narratives, exchanges (6th-12th centuries)**

### Abstract

The presence in Jerusalem of Nubian Christians performing their liturgies and welcoming pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre is confirmed several times in written travel sources from the 10th century onwards. These references multiply in the Latin texts of the Crusader era, both before and after the conquest of the city by Saladin (AD 1187).

The small African community praying in the Place of the Resurrection and living in the surrounding buildings became a pole of attraction, manifesting a precise identity and marking a presence among different national and confessional groups sharing the same urban space. Its strength was nourished by continuous relationship with the motherland, which established cultural and diplomatic relations in the microcosm of Jerusalem.

The origins of this community, described in devotional and hagiographic tales, go back to an undetermined time whereas its end dates to the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century: the presence of a community of Nubians in Jerusalem seems to have died out a few decades after the fall of Dongola's reign.

Its secular history, mostly reconstructed indirectly, through the testimonies in the sources generated by other religious groups (Christian and not), refers to a set of travels, diplomatic and missionary merchant activities that extended from the area of the Cataracts of the Nile to the Mediterranean, the Near East and Mesopotamia. The Jerusalem community connected also with the networks of monasteries and with the exchanges that took place within them (involving monks, missionaries, manuscripts, liturgies, hagiographic stories, devotions).

The Red Sea ports played a key role: the Nubian area, through the passages across the Horn of Africa, connected with the sea routes and then with caravan tracks that crossed the deserts of the Near East. Thus, Byzantium and Baghdad could also be reached via Jerusalem, an ideal and real point of reference for African Christians.

The story of the small community of Nubians who prayed stably at the Tomb of Christ testifies to the vivacity of the cross-cultural medieval context of the area of the Cataracts in which Christianity was an element of openness to the outside and a catalyst for cultural exchanges.

## 1. The Nubian presence at the Holy Sepulchre

A clear attestation of the presence of Nubians at the Holy Sepulchre is given by Theodericus, who, in AD 1175, in his *Itinerarium*, wrote:

Ante ostium vero ipsius chori altare non mediocre habetur, quod ad Surianorum tantummodo spectat officium. Deinque, peractis a Latinis quotidie divinis officiis, Suriani vel ibidem ante chorum sive in aliqua ecclesiae abside divinos decantare solent hymnos; qui etiam plura in ipsa ecclesia habent altariola nullorumque nisi suis usibus apta vel concessa. Haec sunt professiones sive sectae, quae in ecclesia hierosolymitana divina peragunt officia, scilicet Latini, Suriani, Armenii, Graeci, Jacobini, Nubiani. Hi omnes tam in conversatione quam in divinis officiis suas quisque habent differentias, Jacobini in suis festis Haebreorum more tubis utuntur<sup>1</sup>.

The centrality of liturgical uses (*officium*) as an element of identity is highlighted, and the terms *professio* and *secta* are used to indicate the different groups of Christians, focusing on their differences.

Theodericus would be followed by a number of other authors<sup>2</sup>.

The Nubian presence, indicated in a 'national' and liturgical sense, can be seen as an indicator of a much wider centuries-old network of relations between the area of the Cataracts and Jerusalem. It is a clear element (in many respects an emblematic one) of a long standing historical cultural phenomenon, which today can be well delineated on the basis of the continuous, rich historiography that precedes us and a number of published documents.

Johan Michael Vansleb's pioneering surveys<sup>3</sup> and the studies by Francis Llewellyn Griffith<sup>4</sup>, Ugo Monneret de Villard<sup>5</sup>, Laurence Patrick Kirwan<sup>6</sup>, Enrico Cerulli<sup>7</sup>, Giovanni Vantini have all contributed, each with its specific approach and dealing with

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<sup>1</sup> Theodericus, *De locis sanctis*, p. 20; *Itinera Hierosolimitana Crucesignatorum (Saec. XII-XIII)*, II, *Tempore regum Francorum (1100-1187)*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>2</sup> A general overview is in CECCARELLI MOROLLI 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See: Vansleb, *Nouvelle relation*, Vansleb, *Histoire de l'Église d'Alexandrie*. Consider the most recent edition Vansleb, *Travels in the Levant*.

<sup>4</sup> GRIFFITH 1913; GRIFFITH 1928; GAUTHIER 1932.

<sup>5</sup> Consider as reference works: MONNERET DE VILLARD 1933; MONNERET DE VILLARD 1938; MONNERET DE VILLARD 1941; MONNERET DE VILLARD 1935-57.

<sup>6</sup> Keep as point of reference KIRWAN 1984 and the synthesis HAGG – TÖRÖK – WELSBY 2002.

<sup>7</sup> CERULLI 1943.

its specific context, to making possible the coherent vision of the phenomenon we can construct today<sup>8</sup>.

This vision is also the fruit of editions of manuscript documents including the 1970s publication project for the corpus of Nubian sources carried out by the Polish Academy of Science and the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, recent analyses and excavations have been adding increasingly numerous, reliable documental sources<sup>10</sup>. This line of study passes through the continuous activity of IFAO, its congresses and publishing initiatives<sup>11</sup>.

In such a research scenario, the topic of Nubian Christian presences in Jerusalem takes on a specific relevance in the context of Religious Studies, particularly in connection with such main issues as creation, transformation and extinguishing of identities; religious diasporas; displacing and re-displacing religious groups; dynamics of minority groups; extinction of religious groups.

## **2- Sources about travels and routes between the Upper Nile and Jerusalem**

If we want to approach these critical theses, we cannot ignore the reconstruction of the complex and stratified connections between Nubia, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean<sup>12</sup>. The very evangelization of the Upper Nile takes place in the context of a vast network of exchanges that includes Alexandria and Constantinople

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<sup>8</sup> His long and intense activity as a scholar has led to the publication of texts, sources and archaeological data, as well as the publication of key works, such as: VANTINI 1978; VANTINI 1985; VANTINI 1970.

<sup>9</sup> The Second Symposium of Nubian Studies concluded in Warsaw June 22nd, 1972, led to the establishment of the "Society for Nubian Studies" and to the plan of the Polish Academy of Science and the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften to publish *Fontes Rerum Nubicarum*, both in original text and in English translation. See MICHAŁOWSKI 1975, p. 137. The first part of this forward-looking project has been published as *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia, collected and translated by Fr. Giovanni Vantini FSCJ, published as field manual for excavators at the request of the Society for Nubian Studies*, Heidelberg and Warsaw (The Polish Academy of Sciences, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften) 1975.

<sup>10</sup> ŁAJTAR, OCHALA, VLIET (VAN DER) 2015. See also VLIET (VAN DER), DEKKER 2018; ANDRIOLO, CURTO 2000; TÖRÖK 1988. A wide systematic reflection is in ŁAJTAR, OBLUSKI, ZYCH 2016. See also RICHTER 2018.

<sup>11</sup> We can assume as milestones: LECLANT, VERCOUTTER 1978; HABACHI 1981; GODLEWSKI, ŁAJTAR 2008.

<sup>12</sup> A starting point study is ADAMS 1977, especially pp. 433–546.

and refers to Jerusalem not only as a memorial pole but also as a real urban site located along the routes of the Near East<sup>13</sup>.

We know nothing of Queen Candace's converted and baptized eunuch mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, and there is no certain evidence of a Christian penetration into Nubia before the fourth century<sup>14</sup>.

It is true that the devotional narratives that make him an evangelizer followed and helped by seventy disciples appear only in the fifth century<sup>15</sup>. However, they reflect the awareness of a circulation of Christianity outside the Roman imperial sphere and the perception of Jerusalem as a place of encounter and beginning of the Christian mission.

The same can be said of the accounts that attribute to the apostle Matthew and his missionary journeys the conversion of the king of Meroe and his daughter Iphigenia (later martyr by decision of her father's successor). Attested in the Byzantine context in the sixth century, these accounts mirror the aspiration to an apostolic origin of the Nubian Christian communities, affirming a foundational and memorial link with the Land of Israel<sup>16</sup>.

Other texts, attributable to the networks of monastic settlements, seem to refer to contacts with the monasteries of Sinai and the desert of Judah<sup>17</sup>. Can we imagine a movement or circulation of monks in a wider area, including Jerusalem?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For the Christianization of Nubian kingdoms, see RICHTER 2002, in particular pp. 139-148, where a list of essential documents is provided. About the general topic see: CVETKOVIĆ, GEMEINHARDT 2019; ZACHAROPOULOU 2016; SCHOLZ, REINHARD 1988. A specific place in the study context on the topic must be attributed to MUNRO-HAY 1997-2005. See also BUZI 2006; FIACCADORI 2005.

<sup>14</sup> The historical value to be attributed to the episode (narrated in Acts 8:26-46), is debated. Siegfried Richter, also on the basis of archaeological evidence, argues that the Christianization of the area is not prior to the fourth century (RICHTER 2002, p. 141). Other scholars believe that the episode reflects early contact of the Horn of Africa with Christianity (SCHOLZ 2003).

<sup>15</sup> HATKE 2013, especially the chapter *After Kush: Aksum and Nubia in the Sixth Century CE*, vol.2, p.149; WILSON 2014. About the reception of this tradition VANTINI 1985, pp. 65-68.

<sup>16</sup> RICHTER 2013, in particular pp. 49-50.

<sup>17</sup> About the general issue, see: CECCARELLI MOROLLI 1988; OBŁUSKI 2019; GABRA, TAKLA 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Several references in hagiographical texts indicate the role of monks in spreading the Gospel. For example, a collection of fabulous stories titled "The Garden of the Monks" contains an episode related to the role of

The hagiographical sources give fragmentary traces of an evangelization that took place in the sixth century. They refer to missionaries sent from Constantinople, but also from the monasteries of a much wider area. References to cults for the saints, episodes of miracles and conversions highlight how a common Christian heritage of texts, narratives and devotions spread between Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Nubia<sup>19</sup>.

These elements are set against the background of frequently recurring contacts, in the context of geographical and spatial relationship with the Holy City.

Caravan tracks, crossings and passes between the mountains, ports on the Red Sea (Adulis and Aidhab in particular), maritime routes and roads that cross the Near East form a composite geographical-cultural whole. The sources indicate a strong continuity, in connection with crucial events<sup>20</sup>.

Some of these events date back to the early centuries of Islam, when the inclusion of Egypt in the dominions of the caliphs coincided with armed clashes, raids and other hostilities with the populations of the Upper Nile (which remained outside the spread of the Qur'an)<sup>21</sup>.

### **2.1. The escape of the Ommayyads to Arabia**

An early example of such events is the dramatic flight of the last Umayyads to Arabia. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, fled from Damascus to Egypt in 750 EV. After he

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the monks in the Christianization of Nubia. The monastery of Saint Pacomius in Faw, Upper Egypt, was attacked by brigands from Nubia. One of them entered the church, where Abbot Anastasius was staying. Before he began to plunder her, he hesitated, stopped absorbed and showed the abbot a medal with the image of Pacomius around his neck. The monk asked him: How can our Saint be known to you in Nubia? He replied: A young and holy monk entered our country to preach the Gospel, dressed in a poor wool tunic (VANTINI 1985, pp. 93, 83-85).

<sup>19</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 83-85. The 24<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Venice and Padua 22-27 August 2022 included the panel: M. Łaptaś, W. Godlewski, D. Zielińska, B. Williams, *Christian Nubia as a Bridge between Byzantium and Africa* (proceedings in course of publication).

<sup>20</sup> POWER 2012, pp. 1-18, 38-41, 63-94; VANTINI 1985, pp. 258, 271. **See also the contribute of Julien Loiseau in this volume.**

<sup>21</sup> On the general issue: WELSBY 2002; MARTENS-CZARNECKA 2015.

was killed in battle by the Abbasids, his two sons, Abdalla and Ubaydalla, along with other family members and a few followers, took refuge in Nubia<sup>22</sup>.

From there, pursued by their now victorious opponents, they reached the Red Sea and sought refuge in Arabia.

The account of their escape has been taken up by several Arab historians, who have given different versions. However, regarding the passage from Egypt to the Red Sea through the passes and deserts of Nubia they coincide and do not seem to have been invented.

Ibn Qutayba al-Dinawari quotes the words of Abdalla, who tells of deserted cities but with houses still in good condition and of abandoned castles. In one of these fortresses the group of defeated fugitives received the king of Nubia<sup>23</sup>.

After a very tense exchange with him, the king ordered them to leave within three days. Thus, Abdalla and Ubaydalla, with their retinue, set out for the Red Sea coast.

While crossing the desert territory of the Begias they were assaulted by bands of Begias or Ethiopians. Ubaydalla was killed. The others, after extreme hardship and suffering, managed to get to the Red Sea at Bab-al-Mandeb. There they embarked on a ship headed to Arabia. Abdalla, disguised as a porter (or as a camel driver depending on the version) arrived in Mecca where he was recognized and arrested<sup>24</sup>.

## **2.2. The journey of King George**

Another such event dates back to the beginning of the 9th century.

After the death of Caliph Harun al Rashid in AD 809, there began in Egypt a period of internal armed clashes between factions, supporting different successors. In particular, the Copts demanded a reduction in taxes and pressed for more political space. The Nubians took the opportunity to stop paying the yearly *baqt tribute*<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 126-128. The story is reported by Yaqubi and Ibn Iyas (*Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 74-75, 775-778); Ya'qubi, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 43-45, vol. 3, pp. 1072-1073. About the cultural context of the source see HALILOVIĆ 2019.

<sup>23</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>24</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 74-75; ROBINSON 2010, in particular p. 240.

<sup>25</sup> See the text of Naglaa Boutros in this volume.

This consisted of 360 Moorish slaves, trained monkeys which could imitate men in their manners, animals called zoraphe, elephant tusks and skins of leopards.

In exchange, the Arab caliphs gave wheat, vegetables, olive oil, precious textiles and the king of the Nubians was permitted to collect taxes from the Nubians who were living throughout the empire without hindrance<sup>26</sup>. This situation continued for about thirty years.

In AD 833, Ibrahim, brother of al-Mamun, named by the Syrians Abu-Ishaq and known as al-Mu'tasim, became caliph of Egypt<sup>27</sup>. This dynastic passage entailed a strengthening of territorial and fiscal policies, also linked to the military efforts of the Abbasid dynasty in Asia Minor.

Determined to restore control of the territory and the prerogatives of the caliphs, he sent the king of Nubia a sort of ultimatum, urging him to start paying the *baqt* again, with the arrears of previous years.

According to the account by Michael the Syrian, a diplomatic expedition was foreseen to negotiate new terms of agreement between the Nubians and the Muslims<sup>28</sup>.

In Dongola, before the arrival of the caliph's messenger (AD 834-35), there had been a change in the Nubian dynasty: the government had passed to a man named Zacharias, who was not of royal birth, but had married a princess<sup>29</sup>. He decided to send his son George-Gurghi to deal with the caliph.

The messenger brought this news back to Baghdad, the caliph accepted the proposal and gave instructions to the governors of the territories subjected to him to welcome George and his entourage along the way to Baghdad.

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<sup>26</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 316. On the general topic of Nubian communities out of Nubia: SIMMONS 2019 A.

<sup>27</sup> For a chronological synthesis ZEIDAN 2023.

<sup>28</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 133-141. Selections from the text of Michael the Syrian are in *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 316-321. For the version of Severus *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 192-195; Bar Ebraheus in *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 421; Maqrizi in *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 134-136.

<sup>29</sup> About the general topic of features of kingship, ŁAJTAR – OCHAŁA 2021.



The procession departed in the autumn of AD 835, crossed Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, and eventually arrived in upper Mesopotamia (Gezira of the Euphrates)<sup>30</sup>.

Byzantine Arab wars were underway, and Jerusalem would surrender a few years later<sup>31</sup>.

As the procession approached the cities where George was to stop, his entire retinue, dressed in their Nubian ceremonial garb, displayed their royal *regalia*.

When the king arrived in Callinix (Raqqa) the emir of Gezira came to welcome him. Crowds of Arabs and Christians followed him for some distance to see the unprecedented wonder that was happening in their country. The king was seated on a camel saddle different from that used in their country (Syria). A page held a dome-shaped umbrella made of scarlet cloth over his head. On top of the umbrella was a gold cross. To the right and to the left, young Nubians, all holding a cross, accompanied the king: all these crosses were of gold. Other followers, all black, knights and slaves, stood on the right, left and behind the king. Two bishops and many others in tow died in the journey, due to the intense cold and snow, things unknown in Nubia, they had encountered<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Looking at the events from his political perspective, Maqrizi wrote that the king of Bejas, Ali Baba, accompanied George, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 134. On political implications RABBAT 2022, see in particular Part 2, *The Writings of al-Maqrizi*, pp. 154-204.

<sup>31</sup> For a general historical overview PRAWER 1987. About the context of the city and its spatial, ethnical, and religious transformations GRABAR 1992; GRABAR 2008; PETERS 1993; LASSNER 2017.

<sup>32</sup> George's journey takes place under the control of the caliph, but Michael the Syrian highlights above all the role of the patriarch of Antioch, the see that finally emerges with a greater role also than Jerusalem and Alexandria. The retinue stopped at Callinix on Christmas Day, January 7<sup>th</sup> according to the Coptic rite. George then wrote to the patriarch of Antioch, Dionysius, expressing the desire to meet him before arriving in Baghdad. He refused, because he did not have the permission of the caliph, and postponed the meeting in Baghdad, where he would join him later. The Nubian arrived in Baghdad in February 836, but had an audience only in August, because in the meantime the caliph wanted to verify that he was really a king. Michele the Syrian tells the reason for this delay: a diplomatic incident that attests the presence of Nubian groups in the cities crossed. A servant of George, who was responsible for collecting the taxes collected during the journey by the Nubians living in the cities where the king passed, had rebelled and fled with the collected money. To escape the justice of the king, who was a Christian, he became a Muslim. George, however, made seek him out and put him in chains. He then wrote a letter to the caliph claiming that George was not a true king. Thus his ancestry was reconstructed: he was really not the son of a king, but of a princess, and this, according to Nubian law, was sufficient to be considered of royal blood, according to a matrilineal descent. Having clarified

The episodes of entering the cities are relevant because they highlight: the existence along the path of a network of Nubian communities that were required to pay the tribute to the king; the bond between King George and the patriarch of Antioch (Dionysius) who received him solemnly in the palace of the caliph.

Michael the Syrian puts in evidence only the authority of the prelate, emphasizing the role of the Church of Antioch also in the African context with a text rich in religious and liturgical notes<sup>33</sup>.

Here are the words of Dionysius himself, quoted in the central passage:

I was in Baghdad at the time. After the audience granted to the Nubian king in the new palace between the Tigris and the Euphrates, the caliph sent his personal doctor Suleiman/Salomon (a Christian) to visit the king of the Nubians. We went there with some bishops and faithful. We found he was a clever young man, about twenty years old, well mannered and handsome, worthy of the royal rank on account of his manners. After we had talked with him through an interpreter, we found him to be a faithful orthodox, zealous for his faith, who detested having any communication with the heretics<sup>34</sup>.

Then he adds:

On Sunday we celebrated the Mass, and I gave the communion to him as well as to those who formed his retinue. They had carried with them the sacred vases and all the apparel for the celebration of the mysteries<sup>35</sup>.

George's journey, reported in different sources, had a great impact on the imagery of Nubia in the centuries of the Middle Ages, both in Eastern and Greek Christianity<sup>36</sup>.

### **2.3. The expedition of the *Qummi***

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the situation, it was thus that the meeting with the caliph took place in the most solemn and lavish way. Also took place the meeting with Patriarch Dionysius of Antioch. The patriarch later recognized him as a son and as a faithful Orthodox. (VANTINI 1985, p. 136; *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 316-321).

<sup>33</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, p. 319.

<sup>34</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 320-321.

<sup>35</sup> *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia*, pp. 320, 421.

<sup>36</sup> VANTINI 1985, p. 139.

A third episode dates back to the mid-9th century. In this period, according to Arab sources, the continuous clashes and raids between the Begias and their neighbors subjected to the caliph of Baghdad were also colored by religious aspects. The Begias in fact remained mostly outside the Islamic sphere and Arab texts frequently report that they insulted the Muslim faith, perhaps to provoke violent reactions.

Ibn Taghribirdi reports that Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (AD 847-861) was extremely irritated because this group had rebelled against him and because he had learned that they were blaspheming<sup>37</sup>.

He wanted to send an army against them, but when he was informed about the environmental conditions of the region, he was forced to abandon the idea: the area was a set of deserts, a month's travel away from the countries of Islam, without water, without roads, with deep gorges and no exits.

A man named Mohamed Abdalla, called al-Qummi (because he came from the city of Qum) came to his aid. Al-Qummi had much experience travelling on caravan roads because for years he had worked protecting pilgrims traveling to Mecca.

For unknown reasons he had ended up in prison. From there he offered to lead an expedition against the Begias in exchange for his freedom, which he was granted.

The expedition was victorious: the leader of the Begias, Ali Baba, was captured and taken prisoner, and his personal treasure together with the crown became spoils of war.

What made the expedition successful was a tactical choice of al-Qummi's: before leaving with his army and advancing among the deserts, he was given by the caliph seven ships loaded with barley, cereals, dates, oil, and water, which, departing from Suez, landed in a cove on the Red Sea coast. From there porters were able to supply sustenance to the army as they travelled through the passes and along the caravan routes. Al-Qummi was thus able to reach Aswan and from there enter the Begia territory along the Allaqui valley<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 144-146; *Oriental sources concerning Nubia*, p. 728. See also the witness of Ibn Hawqal, VANTINI 1985, pp. 153-155. See also HUMPHREYS 2009.

<sup>38</sup> VANTINI 1985, p. 145.

His fighters were joined by other Arabs who were already present in the area and who had been subjected to violence and looting.

These events mark the beginning of the settlement of Arabs in the lands of the Begias, where mixed marriages became one of the elements that favoured the Islamization process<sup>39</sup>.

#### **2.4. Pilgrimages to Mecca**

The same Muslim practice of pilgrimages to Mecca may have contributed to joining the area of the Cataracts with Jerusalem through the caravan routes that passed close to the city. The faithful passed along these routes frequently, helping to spread knowledge and maintain supra-regional ties<sup>40</sup>.

These pathways overlap and intersect with the tracks of military expeditions and raids between neighboring peoples. The urban or semi-urban sedentary nature of the population was accompanied by semi-nomadic lifestyles and a frequent pattern of displacement (at least for certain groups).

Such a scenario emerges in the chronicle of Ibn Hawqal (active in the 10th century). Reporting an episode among the numerous raids and punitive expeditions between the Begias and the Nubians, he writes:

The Begias used to come to Qift, a town near Qos, to stock up on wheat and dates. They had a leader called Muha (who was esteemed in the city). The head of the population of Qift was a certain Ibrahim al-Qifti. Accompanied by a group of Muslims, he went on pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way back it passed through Aynuna, where you arrive after crossing the Red Sea, along the Bani Haddan road, towards Talafa<sup>41</sup>.

Ibrahim asked Muha and his Begias to accompany him along the way, perhaps as a form of alliance and protection in a difficult and impervious territory.

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<sup>39</sup> This process is testified explicitly by Masudi, *Oriental sources concerning Nubia*, p. 131.

<sup>40</sup> RUBIN 2008; POWER 2008.

<sup>41</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 142-146; KRAMERS, WIET 1964, vol. I, pp. 49-50.

However, Ibrahim knew the country and the Begias urged their leader Muha to kill him, because he had a precise knowledge of wells, trails and places of camp.

Muha tried to dissuade them but failed to control them and their opinion ended to prevail. So, they made Ibrahim get lost in the desert. They abandoned him and he died of thirst together with all his.

But something unexpected occurred: Ibrahim had a child with him; one of the Begias took pity on the child, saved him, and took him with him to Edfu, in Upper Egypt. From there, the boy returned to Qift and told everything about his father's death.

Qift's family leaders decided to avenge their leader, but their plan remained secret.

According to the chronicle of Ibn Hawqal, when Muha, accompanied by thirty other Begias, all of whom were important, returned to Qift to buy food, as usual, the inhabitants gave them accommodation in one of their churches (*biya'*) and massacred them all<sup>42</sup>.

There followed, year after year, reprisals by the Begias, flights of the inhabitants of the city, negotiations, and new clashes. So much violence and uncertainty of life led to the decay of the city itself and, later, to its abandonment<sup>43</sup>.

### **3 The area of the Cataracts and the Holy City in the medieval Latin sources**

Starting from these premises, it is not surprising that the presence of Nubian Christians in Jerusalem is confirmed in Latin sources, with increasing frequency after the fall of the Crusader kingdom and the conquest of the city by Saladin<sup>44</sup>.

#### **3.1. Richard of Poitiers**

Richard of Poitiers, in his Chronicle written around AD 1172, recalled the existence of a Christian king of the Nubians engaged in fighting against the Muslims<sup>45</sup>. This is perhaps an attestation of an African response to the strong military pressure of

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<sup>42</sup> VANTINI 1985, p. 142.

<sup>43</sup> On the general situation in subsequent decades see AL-BAKRĪ, *Kitāb al-masālik wa-al-mamālik* [Book of Routes and Kingdoms], II, p. 618.

<sup>44</sup> A general summary overview is in VANTINI 1985, pp. 232-241. About the context: MACEVITT 2008; SEIGNOBOS 2012; SEIGNOBOS 2014; WELSBY 2002, pp. 76-77.

<sup>45</sup> Richardus Pictauensis, *Chronica*, p. 84; VANTINI 1985, p. 224; SIMMONS 2020.

Saladin; certainly, it was news on which the hopes of a crusader alliance would be based.

### **3.2. Robert de Clari**

Robert de Clari in AD 1204 in Constantinople met a black Christian king in the emperor's palace<sup>46</sup>. Through an interpreter he told him that he had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and that Jerusalem was a hundred days' journey from his country. He had left with a following of sixty people, ten of them had arrived in the holy city, only one servant remained with him in Constantinople.

He said that he was planning to go to Rome and then to the tomb of the apostle James in Spain.

After this journey he would have remained in Jerusalem until the day of judgment, thus implementing the mystical practice of pilgrimage without return, a clear attestation of the eschatological value that was recognized to the city.

### **3.3. Alberic of Trois-Fontaines**

Alberic of Trois-Fontaines, a French monk on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in AD 1205, is the author of a *Chronicle* (continued and perhaps interpolated by one of his disciples) in which he lists the presence of Christians in the city. Introducing the Jacobites and Nubians he defines them by the word *ordo*, which implies the reference to the rite and to the fact that the members of these communities follow a liturgy and rules of their own<sup>47</sup>. In this way he refers to a Church identity based on the use of a specific language and on a celebration code, handed down to a precise, stable group.

A further confirmation comes from the *Chronica Slavorum* of Arnold of Lubeck, written around AD 1209<sup>48</sup>.

### **3.4. The poem "Ernestus"**

A poetic and problematic text dating back to the first decade of the thirteenth century, although it cannot be considered as a historical source, gives an idea of how

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<sup>46</sup> FIACCADORI 2005; PONTANI 2015.

<sup>47</sup> "[...] Sextus ordo Iacobinianorum, cui a diebus imperatoris Marciani viri catholici et impiissimi Nestori cepisse dicuntur; isti uno solo digito se signant et signum crucis faciunt. Septimus ordo dicitur Nubianorum christianorum, quorum terra maxima est et multi ex eis tributarii Saracenorum sunt", *Chronica Alberici Trium Fontium*, p. 935.

<sup>48</sup> Arnoldus, *Chronica*, p. 238.

black Christians were a stable presence in Jerusalem and along the routes to the Holy Land in the perception of Latins.

A man named Otto wrote the Latin epic poem *Ernestus*, dedicated to Albert (Archbishop of Magdeburg from AD 1205 to AD 1232). Here we are dealing with a literary composition integrating fantastic elements with *topoi* and copying from one text to another, probably based on many pilgrimage reports and poetic compositions. The story may have contributed to spread a positive perception of African Christians in an anti-Islamic perspective<sup>49</sup>.

A Duke named Ernest of Bavaria, the protagonist, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem with a group of companions. Surprised by a storm, they were shipwrecked and found themselves on a boat with some black-faced "moors" (*Mauri adusti*).

In reply to his questions about who they were and where they were going, they said: "We are worshippers of Christ born of the Virgin; our country is called Ubia, which the ancients called Meroe. While we were out trading, a storm surprised us and threw us here [...]"<sup>50</sup>. Ernest manifested his will to go to Jerusalem to them and they offered to accompany him.

### **3.5. Jacques de Vitry**

Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre from AD 1216, testified to a true diaspora of the Christians of Jerusalem after AD 1187. The Latins would not have been the only group to take refuge there. At the end of AD 1217 he wrote a letter to Liutgard of the Benedictine abbey of Saint Trond, in which he recounted his arrival in the fortress city:

"Erant ibi Jacobite cum episcopo suo, qui more iudeorum parvulos circumcidebant et nulli preter Domino peccata sua in confessione aperiebant. Alii vero ex ipsis non circumcidebantur et sacerdotis peccata sua confitebantur. Sed uno digito tam isti quam illi signum crucis facientes se signabant"<sup>51</sup>.

He did not indicate by name the individual groups, but in the *Historia orientalis* he showed that he knew their denominations and characteristics:

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<sup>49</sup> The text, which cannot be considered a historical source, is indicative of the cultural context and suggests the perceptions of Africa in Latin Christianity. It is part of a set of poetic and legendary compositions created around the story of the Crusades. See SIMMONS B 2019.

<sup>50</sup> *Epos: Ernestus*, vol. 3, p. 368; VANTINI 1985, p. 235.

<sup>51</sup> RÖCHRICHT 1894, p. 109.

“Sunt praeterea in Terra Sancta et in aliis partibus Orientalibus aliae barbarae nationes, a Graecis et Latinis in multis dissidentes, quorum alios Jacobitas appellant, a quodam magistro suo dicto Jacobo, cuiusdam Alexandrini Patriarchae discipulo. Hi a multis iam temporibus a Costantinopolitano Patriarcha Dioscoro excommunicati et ab Ecclesia Graecorum sequestrati, maiorem partem Asiae et totius tractus Orientalis inhabitant: quidem inter Sarracenos, alii autem proprias absque infidelium consortio occupaverunt, scilicet Nubiam, quae contermina est Aegypto et magnam Aethiopiae partem et omnes regiones usque in Indiam plus quam quadraginta regna, ut asserunt, continentes. Omnes autem sunt christiani, a beato Mattheo Apostolo et aliis Apostolicis viris ad Christi fidem converse”<sup>52</sup>.

Thus, he refers to Nubia too, providing a glimpse of a large, composed ecclesiological vision, that draws from the preaching of the Apostles to establish a rediscovered unity.

### **3.6. Burcardus**

Burcardus of Mount Sion, notes with admiration and curiosity, in the *Itinerarium* (AD 1283) the devotional attitudes of the different groups, which find a common denominator in the attachment to the Memorial Places of the life of Jesus<sup>53</sup>. He writes:

“Quis enim enarrare sufficiat quot monachi, quot moniales de Georgia, de Armenia maiore et minore, Chaldea, Media, Syria, Persia, India, Ehiopia, Nabenia, Maronite Nestoriani, Graeci Syri et aliarum nationum nunc turmatim centeni duecenteni plus et minus discurrentes per loca singula in spiritu vehementi osculantur terram venerantur loca in quibus dulcem Ihesum sedisse, stetisse vel facisse quippiam operis audierunt”<sup>54</sup>.

### **3.7. He'tum**

In the context of fragile alliances forged around the Mediterranean, where weak Christian kingdoms looked to the future with concern for military support and new

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<sup>52</sup> JACOBUS DE VITRIACO, *Historia orientalis*, p. 1091.

<sup>53</sup> BAUMGÄRTNER 2002. About the context of this kind of texts CAMPOPIANO 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Peregrinatores Medi Evi quattuor, p. 20; Burchardus de Monte Sion, *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*, pp. 212-213.



hope, the Armenian Augustinian monk He'tum - Hayton, brother of the king of Cyprus, wrote a short pamphlet in AD 1307: "La Fleur des Histoires de la Terre d'Orient"<sup>55</sup>. He narrated events of which he was a direct witness and others he had heard about. Addressing Pope Clement V, he urged him to write a letter to the Nubian king asking him in turn to wage war on the sultan<sup>56</sup>. The text highlights how their Christianity is of apostolic origin, traceable to Saint Bartholomew, apostle of Ethiopia. The intermediary of the letter was most likely the king of Armenia then a guest in Cyprus. He would have had the letter translated and would then have entrusted it to his ambassadors<sup>57</sup>.

We do not know for certain that this is what happened, but the *libellus* refers several times to "black" African Christian as part of a strategical network unifying the different elements of the ecumene around the common aim to control Jerusalem and the Holy Land<sup>58</sup>.

As the Christian kingdoms of Nubia began to decline and the Latins struggled to contain the Muslim potentates along the southern coast of the Mediterranean, the idea of an alliance between Christians in the north and south of Egypt resulted in awkward diplomatic attempts<sup>59</sup>.

We are not sure that there was any direct contact, but the circulation of this project shows how the presence of the Christians of Nubia in Jerusalem and in the religious political scene of the Near East was an acquired element. Furthermore, it seems that they were perceived as a power capable of destabilizing Egypt and, therefore, of limiting the influence of the Sultan of Cairo with respect to the entire region.

### **3.8. Marin Sanudo Torcello**

This ambition seems to take a more concrete diplomatic form when the Venetian Marin Sanudo Torcello, in AD 1321, presented the pope in Avignon with a crusade

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<sup>55</sup> VANTINI 1985, p. 255; BUNDY 1987; BAIS 2015, p.214; OSIPIAN 2014.

<sup>56</sup> He'tum of Corycus, *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, pp. 238, 246-247.

<sup>57</sup> He'tum of Corycus, *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, p. 238.

<sup>58</sup> He'tum of Corycus, *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, pp. 236, 237, 241.

<sup>59</sup> He'tum of Corycus, *La Flor des Estoires de la Terre d'Orient*, pp. 237, 242.

project that provided for the naval blockade of Egypt<sup>60</sup>. The diplomatic scheme envisaged the active involvement of various Christian political actors, both in the Mediterranean area and in Africa. It would have been a matter of coordinating different attacks and focusing on the fleets of Venice and the European allies to damage the caliphate of Cairo.

Sanudo knew that an attack from the south would be very useful to the cause of the Latin Christians, but he was skeptical about the actual support of the Nubians. He had in fact been at least five times in Egypt, where direct news circulated about the populations of the Upper Nile (also thanks to the Genoese merchants who from AD 1290 had obtained a license to trade with them up to Dongola). There, it was known that the Nubians were small in number and did not have sufficient military forces, as they themselves were in difficulty defending themselves from the Arab-Islamic advance.

### **3.9. Jacopo da Verona**

Fra' Jacopo da Verona, prior of the convent of Sant'Eufemia, was in the Holy Land in AD 1335 and left a very detailed *Itinerarium*<sup>61</sup>. Speaking of the Christians present in Jerusalem, he also mentions the Nubians and the *Jabeni* (perhaps a corruption of Abyssinians).

In this report, which speaks of a real Nubian quarter in Jerusalem, Fra' Jacopo wrote that the "calogeri Nubiani" (probably monks) sang and prayed day and night, used bread fermented for the Eucharist, did not raise the bread after the consecration, sang Halleluja more than a hundred times in a single mass, always carried a cross and called each other "Christians of Saint Thomas"<sup>62</sup>. He added that they had privileges from the Sultan of Egypt (including the freedom to carry and exhibit crosses in the presence of Muslims) because the Sultan feared they could divert the course of the Nile and cause death by dehydration in all the downstream territories.

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<sup>60</sup> Marin Sanudo Torcello, *Liber secretorum fidelium crucis*, pp. 50-53. An English translation is in Marin Sanudo Torcello, *The Book of the Secrets*. See also LAZZI 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Jacopo da Verona, *Liber Peregrinationis*, pp. 32, 60-61, 149-150.

<sup>62</sup> VANTINI 1985, pp. 237-238.

The text, almost a live report aimed at providing practical information to travelers, outlines the structure of the Mamluk city indicating the presence of different religious groups. There are tangible and intangible indications that the Nubians had their own stable presence in the area, which included a group of buildings and the development of liturgies that also took place in the outdoor spaces<sup>63</sup>.

### **3.10. Nicolò da Poggibonsi**

Nicolò da Poggibonsi, in his travel text dating back to AD 1345-47, speaks of Christians of *Tiopia* and *India* (a term that indicated the lands surrounding Egypt). He adds that these Indians were black like the Ethiopians but less numerous<sup>64</sup>.

In a passage referring to the Holy Sepulchre he speaks of Nubians.

Greeks, Christians of the Belt and Nubians are lined up on one side of the square (of the Holy Sepulchre). On the other side, there are Nubians, Jacobites, Georgians and Latins. The Nubians celebrate their offices at the altar behind the Holy Sepulchre, immediately after the Ethiopians. This people (the Nubians) loves the Latins very much, but the Sultan of Babylon does not allow any Latins to go to their country for fear that they will later make war against him. Instead, those of "Tiopia" travel through Egypt to Jerusalem openly carrying a cross through the lands of the Saracens. This privilege was granted to them because the sultan fears their king. [...] <sup>65</sup>.

The description refers to the celebrations of Holy Saturday and can hypothetically demonstrate the existence of liturgies unifying several different Christian groups in a processional form, or rather, in some specific passages of ritual gathering. The topology of gestures and movements mirrors the composite structure of the local Church, in which Nubians have their relevant and evident place.

### **3.11. John of Hildesheim**

John of Hildesheim, around AD 1351, is the author of a *Historia trium magorum*, a problematic imaginative text that combines literary elements, contemporary news

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<sup>63</sup> For a general overview see LUTFI 1985; LITILE 1999. About spatial issues: BURGOYNE 1987; JOHNS 1988.

<sup>64</sup> MAYERSON 1993; SCHNEIDER 2004.

<sup>65</sup> VANTINI 1985, p. 238.

and elements of pilgrimage texts from previous centuries. It is probably the oldest text that refers to the African provenance of one of the Magi, Melchior, who went to worship the Child Jesus in Bethlehem<sup>66</sup>.

He also wrote that the Nubians owned a chapel dedicated to the .OVirgin and the Magi in Jerusalem, in the complex of the Holy Sepulchre. It would have been carved into the rock at the foot of Calvary. That space would later be passed on to the Ethiopians<sup>67</sup>.

### **3.12. The travel of Saint Eustathe (AD 1338)**

A significant testimony, which must be considered separately, is the part of the text of the *Acta Sancti Eustathi* relating to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem<sup>68</sup>. The Ethiopian monk Eustathe - Ewostatewos, venerated as a saint, left his homeland in AD 1338 and crossed Nubia, with other monks, led by Archangel Michael.

This agiographical memory stands out in the context of Ethiopian monasticism, against the background of relationships and pathways between Ethiopia and Nubia<sup>69</sup>.

It overlaps with the dynastic aspirations of the kings of Ethiopia, who claimed descent from King Solomon and considered Jerusalem as the symbolic place of origin of the line going back to the queen of Sheba.

Nothing is said about the territories through which Eustathe passed, but the text describes the encounter with the Nubian king, providing some key elements: the paths of the Ethiopian Christian pilgrims bound for the holy city crossed the Upper Nile, which seems to have been at the center of the African connections with the Near East; the kingdom of Nubia was threatened by non-Christian enemies (who did not find it difficult to identify with the Muslim groups that would eventually prevail). It is therefore a testimony that illuminates the last phase of the Christian kingdoms of

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<sup>66</sup> The african origin of Melchiar is described in Giovanni di Hildesheim, *La storia dei Re Magi*, chapter VI, pp. 95-98, 244-245. The text presupposes the geography of three Indes, overlapping the figure of the Nubian king with that of Priest John, see in particular p. 238. About the context of the tradition of the legend HARRIS 1959.

<sup>67</sup> CERULLI 1943, vol. 1, pp. 276-277, 289-292.

<sup>68</sup> *Acta Sancti Eustathii*, pp. 3-97.

<sup>69</sup> OBLUSKI 2019, in particular p. 126.

Nubia, which seems to strengthen its identity precisely thanks to the devotional link with the Holy Sepulchre.

The *Acta* report:

[...] The king of Nubia was a virtuous man of orthodox religion: he believed in the Wood of the Cross of Christ. His name in Arabic was Sab'a Nōl and in ge'ez Welūda Ityōpyā (son of Ethiopia). Her mother was a pious woman, who gave hospitality to the poor and pilgrims who went to the Holy Sepulchre, washed their feet and drank with faith the water of ablution. It was for the prayers of these Ethiopian pilgrims that she conceived and had a son named Sab'a Nōl. He sent one of his chamberlains to tell our father Eustathius: "May your arrival be a blessing for us! A people of corrupt faith and armies of ungodly people have joined forces to bring down my kingdom... I must go and fight urgently. O most revered father, pray to God for us that he may give us victory over these wicked infidels, by corrupt faith and morals. If I return victorious, o father, I will give you a basin of smooth horn and metal, tied with strips of skin, to wash your feet" [...] The king went out to fight, accompanied by four men on horseback and another on foot carrying the Cross of Christ our savior<sup>70</sup>.

Eustathe, seeing his authentic faith, prayed for him. Thus, the text goes on with the tale of his prodigious victory over the enemies: Father Eustathe appeared to the king at the centre of a flame, suspended between the sky and the ground sitting on a chariot of celestial light; he helped in the battle uttering in a clear voice the psalms of victory.

#### ***4. The end of a community: what survived after the 15<sup>th</sup> century?***

How did the presence of the Nubian community in Jerusalem end? The question refers to the great general theme in Religious Studies: how can a community be extinguished, how does a religious group end?<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>71</sup> For an updated overview see: STAUSBERG 2021; WRIGHT, STAUSBERG, CUSACK 2020. See also ROBBINS 2014.

While the fall of Soba and that of Dongola can be reconstructed by means of several sources, both on a military and demographic level, the modalities of extinction of this national group in the Holy City can only be hypothesized.

An illuminating testimony comes from the *Synaxarium Arabicum Jacobiticum*, written between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as an Arabic translation of an earlier Coptic redaction<sup>72</sup>.

On 19 December, the text quotes the words of Anastasius, narrating the story of saint Qafra the Nubian, the new king of Nubia, who choose the monastic life. He moved to the monastery of Abu Shenute (*Chenoudah*) and then had a mystical ~~his~~ journey to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem (*Beit al-Moqaddes*).

We should note that this trip has every feature of a ~~mystical~~ vision:

Only one night passed. When the sun rose we found ourselves in a place full of light, sparkling with splendour, with hanging lamps. I looked around: it was a high building, completely flooded with light. As I turned, I saw an altar covered and concealed with red leather, over which guardians were watching; no one could approach [...] <sup>73</sup>.

The account goes on to narrate the meeting with a guardian surprising the Saint and his companions who were inside the Holy Sepulchre totally closed from outside, sealed:

“We were so happy about what we were contemplating that our souls were about to leave our bodies, when the servant of the Church of the Resurrection (al-qiyama) came and found us there. He asked us: Where are you from?” and shouted at us. We were frightened and said: “We have come here to pray”. Then he left us. While we were there, the man who had been our guide arrived and said to the guardian: “God was pleased that this people were found in his dwelling”. Then he apologized and

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<sup>72</sup> For a general overview on the text and its redactions *Synaxarium Arabicum Jacobiticum*, vol. I, pp. 219-221.

<sup>73</sup> *Synaxarium Arabicum Jacobiticum*, vol. III, pp. 514-516; *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia*, pp. 438-443, in particular pp. 439-441; OBLUSKI, ARTUR 2019, pp. 125-127.

showed us around the places and the memorials of our Lord Jesus the Messiah. We stayed three days”<sup>74</sup>.

After this mystical story, a silence seems to have fallen over the relationships between Nubia and Jerusalem and the presence of Nubians in Jerusalem, at least in the surviving written sources.

In AD 1517, with the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman troops of Selim I, the center of the Muslim world moved to Istanbul. The part of the area of the Cataracts that had been conquered by Egypt, merged into the Ottoman domains. The rest of Nubia, south of the Third Cataract, broke into small states that did not find stable forms of cohesion<sup>75</sup>.

The port of Aidhab, on the west coast of the Red Sea, had already been destroyed in AD 1426 by order of Sultan Barsbay, who had ordered ships to land at Jeddah. The Begias kept the Jeddah port alive for a few more decades, inviting ships to anchor there. Then it was supplanted by the landing at Sawkin.

From this point on, Latin sources no longer mention connections and journeys between Nubia and Jerusalem through the Red Sea and references to Nubian presences into the City seem to cease. By contrast, the Ethiopians are now mentioned and the great group of Jacobites (or Surians) is generically named.

Within the context of the urban displacement of religious nuclei, the Monastery of Saint Mary Magdalene, in the north-eastern quadrant of the city, near the Gate of Herod, north of the Via Dolorosa, continued to be indicated as a point of reference for non-*Calcedonian* communities, but they are no longer distinguished individually<sup>76</sup>.

The attestations agree that Saladin had only driven out the Latins and allowed all other groups to continue to stand and officiate in the Holy Sepulchre. Thus began the division of the interior space into chapels and reserved spaces, a fragmentation of the liturgical space that corresponds to the multiplication of the prerogatives of the individual groups.

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<sup>74</sup> *Synaxarium Arabicum Jacobiticum*, p. 516; *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia*, p 441.

<sup>75</sup> MENAGE 1988; PEACOCK 2012. A punctual analysis on a strategic place is ALEXANDER, ADAMS W.Y., ADAMS N. 2019.

<sup>76</sup> The monastery's foundations were incorporated into the construction of the new Maymuniyya in 1891, CERULLI 1943, vol. 1, pp. 10-11; ARNON 1992.

This trend was accentuated in the following centuries, when certain groups, favored from time to time by the governors, expanded their rights at the expense of other Christian Churches, which became minorities or disappear.

First Mamluk and then Ottoman rulers, from time to, granted time privileges, rights of use, temporary concessions to groups of Christians more loyal or more able to pay tribute. These advantages were to the detriment of the weakest communities and those that did not have a “mother country” able to defend them or negotiate for them.

In this situation it is difficult to imagine a continuity of possessions and prerogatives for the Nubians, whereas there are numerous attestations of places and altars assigned to the Ethiopians. To their Chapel in the apse of the Holy Sepulchre, the space officiated from ancient times were added: the Cave of David on Zion acquired between AD 1464 and AD 1479; the Chapel of *Impropria* acquired shortly before AD 1464; and finally, the Chapel of Saint Mary at the Golgota.

There are, therefore, two hypotheses about the modalities of the disappearance of the Nubian group: either the Nubians were absorbed into the Ethiopian community; or, more probably,

they were included in the large group of Jacobites (who shared theological beliefs and liturgical practices as well as, in part, hierarchies).

In either case, when the flow of pilgrims, monks and clergy from the Upper Nile weakened and then stopped, in all likelihood, the group of Christians from that area present in Jerusalem also died out.

It seems reasonable to presume that a religious group in Jerusalem would die out because of lack of support from and connections with a failing mother country community. It is hoped that further study of the Jerusalem sources of the Mamluk and Ottoman era can provide concrete evidence which will allow us to replace our hypotheses with certainties.

In other words, the critical problem arises of defining both circumstances and modalities of the extinction of a religious community, in relation to its major group of belonging, which also ends its historical existence.

The context of the events is quite particular: the microcosm of Jerusalem, that reflects in its internal dynamics the bonds and the balance of power of the entire Christian



ecumene. The various Churches maintain in the city institutions and organized presences, which, from time to time, are supported, financed, favoured or penalized depending on the power of their motherlands.

By consequence, establishing whether and how the Nubian presence at the Holy Sepulchre had continuity after the end of the Christian Kingdoms of the Upper Nile implies clarifying general dynamics into relationships between religious groups.

Elements of linguistic, geographical and cultural belonging may have guided the choices of individuals. Monastic communities, structured by very large networks and often independent from political powers, may have influenced forms of survival of cults, devotions, liturgical forms.

The patrimonial aspects, as well as the definition of rights and prerogatives, appear as acts that seal political and institutional processes. However, other elements, such as the passage of individuals within other communities or the persistence of cults and rites, can follow long-lasting paths and outline transformations and changes, rather than an end *tout court*.

The very preservation of a memory of the Nubian community in Jerusalem can be considered a process that integrates different elements.

The clarification of the steps of this group's extinction can only pass through the identification of historical data of different types, as well as the evaluation of differentiated sources.

Starting from the archives of the Custody of the Holy Land and the archives of the Armenian and Orthodox Churches, documentary sources of the Mamluk and Ottoman eras relating to the management of the Holy Places and Christian religious property, may provide indirect information on the transfer of ownership and properties that originally belonged to the Nubians.

New editions of chronicles and travel diaries of the Late Medieval period (and perhaps even later) will bring out data and insights on survivals of pilgrimages from Africa, memories, meetings.

Likewise, the increase in editions of Coptic and Arab liturgical sources may hopefully also bring out indications of the presence of Nubian elements, even after the 14th Century. As part of an integrated reconstruction, individual elements will contribute to clarify the general process.

Within a methodological framework able to compare the different components of the paradigmatic experience of the religious groups present in Jerusalem, the "case" of the Nubians at the Holy Sepulcher will highlight elements of modelling, replicable in other historical contexts.

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